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ABSTRACT

Young adult literature (YAL) is an important and valuable tool for helping students learn and for motivating them to read. YAL also helps students gain insights into themselves and others. YAL (1) is written and marketed primarily for teenagers; (2) has main characters similar in age (12-25) to its readership; (3) has relatively uncomplicated plot lines; and (4) has issues matching the interests, needs, and concerns of teens. Historical fiction, coming-of-age, science fiction, fantasy, mystery/suspense, and non-fiction are the principal genres. Another genre called horror or shock fiction has been criticized by some as inappropriate. The coming-of-age genre deals with problems adolescents face; other genres, such as historical fiction/non-fiction in Crowdog's "Lakota Woman," overlap. YAL, as all other forms of literature, has its limitations--that is why YAL should be used as a supplement to the main texts of the class, where it may help with lessons by offering further insights, fact retention, and enjoyment. (Contains 6 references; lists of coming-of-age and cultural YA books are appended.) (CR)

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The Glory of Young Adult Literature

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The Glory of Young Adult Literature

Quiet isn't a word in a house of nine children. But if it isn't the ruckus of my siblings, it is the spooky, creaking noise of our old house. As I needed a quiet place to craft this project, I decided to head for the local library. Once inside the still haven, and after laying textbooks, papers, folders, pens, and note cards on the table, I realized I didn't know how to begin. After sitting for fifteen minutes staring at the kites hanging from the library ceiling, projects the neighborhood children had made, I decided to go browsing. As I wandered, I came upon the juvenile literature section. I hadn't been there for so long. After being bombarded in school with classics, Shakespeare, anthologies of great works, textbooks, adult readers, and other intellectual literatures, I realized that I had abandoned that which I had loved to read most during my adolescent years--young adult literature.

Young adult literature (YAL) is an important and valuable tool for helping students learn and for motivating them to read. YAL also helps students to gain insights into themselves and others (Brozo & Simpson 1995). It is misguiding to use YAL as the sole texts for a class, unless one is conducting a writing and reading workshop; YAL should be used as a supplement. Specialized commercial textbooks may be boring and uninteresting to young people. The adolescent years call for fast paced excitement and a search for meaning in everything, and textbooks can be dry, slow, and sleep inducing. They don't hold the student's interest for long. Since YA books are written for adolescents with adolescent

characters, students would enjoy these books more, at the same time taking from these books what the main lesson calls for, whether the lesson calls for character analysis or the structure of plots and settings.

What is YAL? Brozo and Simpson (1995) have outlined six characteristics of YAL:

(a) YAL is written or marketed primarily for teenagers;

(b) YAL has main characters similar in age to the teenage readership (young adults between the ages of approximately twelve and twenty-five);

(c) YAL has relatively uncomplicated plot lines;

(d) issues found in YAL match the interests, needs, and concerns of teenagers; and

(e) though YAL is not specifically targeted towards young adults, they attract a young adult readership.

These authors further discuss that YAL: (a) develops honest, credible characters; (b) avoids condescending or preachy tones; and (c) allows readers to leave themselves and enter a new world only to return to oneself a changed person. There are several major genres or types of YA books. Once again, this writer turns to Brozo and Simpson (1995) to outline the different genres:

(a) Historical fiction, which allows adolescents to appreciate important historical events on human terms, from the eyes of individuals of adolescent age who experienced history;

(b) Coming of Age, which portrays characters who

are grappling with the transition from childhood to adulthood;

(c) Science fiction;

(d) Fantasy, which explores the quest for good and truth, meeting the needs of adolescents who are on a quest to discover where they fit into the world;

(e) Mystery and Suspense;

(f) Non-fiction, which is written by authorities who cover various topics using engaging and informative writing styles, and from the perspectives of young adults.

YAL, because it contributes to the shaping of values and the inference of meaning in the students' growth and lives. There is another genre that should be added to Brozo's and Simpson's list. It is the horror genre or what most writers have called shock fiction. Among shock writers are: Cusick; Hoh, who wrote The Nightmare Series; and Pine, the creator of Terror Academy. But perhaps the foremost and popular writer of shock fiction for YAL would be Stine (West 1995).

It was last winter when this writer returned home for the winter break that she found her younger sister reading a Stine book from his Fear Street series. This writer asked her why she wasn't doing her homework, and she responded tartly that she *was* doing her homework. This writer didn't know whether she retorted sourly because this writer had disturbed her or because she was getting tired of everybody telling her to do her homework. Besides being a reluctant homework doer, this writer's sister is a reluctant reader, and so it was a

surprise to see her reading, especially if it was a homework assignment. Upon surveying the dining room table cluttered with papers and book bags, this writer realized that there were more Stine books. Risking a tongue lashing from her younger sister, this writer interrupted her again to inquire whether the Stine books were hers as well. She grunted, and bewildered, this writer left her alone to her reading. Although overjoyed to see that the younger sister was reading, this writer wondered at the selection the teacher had made. Perhaps Brozo and Simpson did not include horror in their list of genres because horror doesn't contribute to the well-being of adolescents?

Before returning home for the break, a professor of this writer (quite appropriately) handed out an article entitled The Horror of R.L. Stine by West. In the article, West (1995) writes that "reading [shock fiction] becomes a crude tool of physical stimulation, wholly devoid of mental, emotional, or spiritual engagement." She further writes that in shock fiction, a raw catalogue of horrors and grotesqueries is used, not interpreted, not stylized, not in any way transformed by a writer for good or bad--to change the nerve endings of young readers. Shock writers deliver fix after blunt fix to shock (in other words, satisfy) their audience (West 1995). She even goes as far as calling Stine books pornography. These accusations continue throughout the article. West includes case studies of young readers recounting their emotions and the sensations they felt when reading Stine books. The case studies and excerpts West has shown are enough evidence to make this writer wary. But

what's so wrong about tingly, creepy shivers going up and down one's spine? These sensations are felt every day by many people, and adolescents are people. They do have a right to feel tingly, creepy shivers. Adults try to shield their young from many things, things that perhaps the young may learn from, things such as death, sex, violence, hatred, life, growth, knowledge, meaning, and tingly, creepy shivers; this shielding does more harm than good. It's absurd. As a society, we don't live in a harm free and blissful world, why try to make the young believe so?

The YAL genres Brozo and Simpson have termed coming of age is what most people would call problem books, that is books dealing with the problems adolescents face as they grow older, problems such as individuality, sexuality, world concerns, acceptance, and belonging, racism, sibling rivalry, divorce, love, AIDS, and yes, even death, etc. For a list of some books addressing these issues, see Appendix A. Also, there are cultural YAL for young adults. Due to readability constraints, limited space, and other restraints, textbooks and commercial texts are formally written about diverse cultures. They list facts, and they are boring and uninteresting, sending students the message that the culture being discussed is boring. YAL, however, gives students a more personal look at the various cultures. They are often narrated by the young people of that culture, people young adults can relate to. YAL eliminates the dry, detached tone of a textbook, and at the same time further emphasizes information found in the textbook. For a list of cultural books, see Appendix B. As in this list, most culture books

overlap with historical fiction.

Another advantage to having students read YAL is that many of these genres overlap each other, exposing students to a few genres simultaneously. This gives students an opportunitiy to experience more than one kind of learning. Among many, some examples of this overlapping are: Echoes of the White Giraffe by Choi lets students experience both historical fiction (the Korean War) and coming of age (a young Korean girl dealing with the loneliness of being a refugee and helping her mother deal with the fact of missing family members); Lakota Woman overlaps non-fiction and historical fiction; A Wrinkle in Time by L'Engle covers coming of age, mystery and suspense, fantasy, and science fiction; The Story Catcher covers non-fiction and historical fiction; etc. YAL, as supplements to textbooks, can help with lessons by further offering insights, facts retainment, and enjoyment. Cultural YAL helps students to appreciate and respect diverse cultures. Since students, especially multicultural students, read at different rates with different abilities and interests, and with different backgrounds, YAL gives students the opportunity to analyze and compare works, something one cannot get from ordinary textbooks. Also, textbooks expose students to only one reading level and one single style; they don't accommodate students of various levels (Clark 1996).

As all other forms of literature have their limitations, so does YAL--that is why it is stressed that YAL be used as supplements to the main texts of the class. It is not a magic elixir, nor is it an answer to all questions and problems

(Broderick 1990). Although, YAL is a good means of helping young adults to learn language, extend vocabulary and complicated syntax (Brozo & Simpson 1995), they do not offer the calibur of characterization and eenriched themes or ideas (Broderick 1990) which a 400-500 page classic can offer. YAL is used for motivating students to read and for familiarizing them with writing techniques and finding themes they will be required to find in later and more difficult readings. YAL is a stepping stone or a bridge between minor readings and major intellectual works, such as the canon.

6:15 p.m. Having been in the library for nearly eight hours this writer's stomach is signaling to her that it's dinnertime. As this writer is getting ready to clean up her books and papers, she glances at the three other YA books she'd like to read before the end of the semester. It is in the opinion of this writer that one of those three books just might give her tingly, creepy shivers. As she is checking out the books, she shakes her head knowing that it'll be a tough squeeze between reading those books and her other required canonical readings.

APPENDIX A: Coming of Age YA books

Title	**Topic**	**Author**
Bridge to Terabithia	friendship; death	Patterson
Jacob Have I Loved	sibling rivalry; identity	Patterson
The Giver	identity	Lowery
The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter	loneliness; friendship	McCullers
The Small Rain	death of a parent; dreams	L'Engle
A Wrinkle in Time	growing up; accepting oneself; search for truth	L'Engle
Seventeenth Summer	adolescent love	Daly
Julie of the Wolves	survival; courage	George
Trying hard to Hear You	sexual orientation	Scoppetone
My Darling	pregnancy; loneliness	Zindel

APPENDIX B: Cultural YA books

Title	Topic	Author
Sadako and the Thousand Paper Canes	WWII; a young girl's battle with leukemia; death	Coerr
Flight to Canada	Civil War; runaway slaves	Reed
Echoes of the White Giraffe	Korean War; refugees	Choi
Banana Bottom	an adopted Jamaican girl's conflict between her two cultures	McKay
The Silver Sword	Nazi Era; escape	Serailler
The Moved Outers	WWII; relocation of Japanese Americans	Means
The Story Catcher	Native American historian narrator	Sandoz
Beloved	Civil War; slavery	Morrison
To Beat A Tiger	Chinese boys' precarious existence of stealing to survive	Lewis
Lakota Woman	A Native American woman tells about the plight to save her people from political circles	Crowdog

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